

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Research and Development**

**BOARD OF SCIENTIFIC COUNSELORS
MERCURY MULTI-YEAR PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Conference Call Summary
March 29, 2005
9:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. EST**

Welcome

Dr. Herb Windom (Skidaway Institute of Oceanography), Chair of the Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) Mercury Multi-Year Plan (MYP) Subcommittee, welcomed the Subcommittee members to the MYP Subcommittee conference call. The purpose of the call was to finalize the draft letter report to the BOSC Executive Committee. The conference call agenda is included as an appendix.

Discussion of the Draft Letter Report

Dr. Windom stated that he had sent the Subcommittee members the current version of the letter report a few weeks earlier, and he noted the changes in this version. Dr. Cindy Gilmour (Smithsonian Environmental Research Center) and Dr. Rogene Henderson (Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute) had revised the text to resolve some inconsistencies and eliminate some redundancies. Dr. Windom had deleted a section about funding because the Subcommittee had not been charged with addressing this issue, but he welcomed a discussion on the matter. The report states that the Office of Research and Development (ORD) is doing a good job with the available funding, but the funding is not sufficient to meet all of the Agency's mercury-related research needs.

The major text revisions involved Question 4. Dr. Windom received editorial comments from Dr. Henderson and Dr. James Johnson (Howard University), which are included in the current version. Dr. Windom was satisfied with this draft, but welcomed discussion about further revisions.

Dr. Windom explained that the document will be submitted to the BOSC Executive Committee prior to the June 2005 meeting. After the report is approved by the Executive Committee at the June meeting, it will be delivered to ORD under Dr. Johnson's signature. There will be some changes in the format so that this report is consistent with other letter reports submitted by the BOSC. Dr. Johnson affirmed that Dr. Windom's description of this process was correct.

Dr. Windom asked for comments on the most recent draft. After this conference call, he will send out a new draft to the Subcommittee members, who will have approximately 1 week to review it and submit their comments. He will incorporate the changes, which he anticipates will

be small typographical corrections, before sending the document to the BOSC Executive Committee. It was requested that the changes be tracked or highlighted.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson explained that the letter report will be submitted by the BOSC under his signature, but the report will include a list of the members of the Mercury MYP Subcommittee.

Dr. Windom expressed his appreciation for Dr. Gilmour and Dr. Henderson's extensive review of the report and asked for their comments. Dr. Henderson stated that she was happy with the report. Dr. Gilmour stressed that the funding issue should be included in the front part of the report, particularly because that often is the only part read by high-level administrators. She added that the 2006 budget for mercury research was proposed to be "zeroed out." Dr. George Lambert (University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey) did not think that the 2006 mercury budget would be eliminated. He added that the Science Advisory Board has been consistent in their assessment that mercury research is under-funded. Dr. Windom replied that the Subcommittee did not examine the funding situation extensively, and asked for comments about how to address this issue in the report.

Dr. Michael Waalkes (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences) added that the Subcommittee did not evaluate funding issues relative to anything else, so there is no real frame of reference to label the program as under-funded. He was uncomfortable stating that the program is under-funded. Dr. Gilmour responded that the Subcommittee addressed the lack of funding in several specific areas (e.g., human health and ecosystem health), in regard to meeting objectives, and in other instances. She emphasized the importance of including this statement.

Dr. Johnson read a sentence from page 3 of the report that addressed the lack of funding. Dr. Windom suggested incorporating this sentence into the first comment in the Overriding Recommendations section, which recommends an interagency council to facilitate collaboration and leveraging of resources. He also expressed concern that the Subcommittee had not assessed other agencies' mercury research efforts. Dr. Windom suggested including a comment about the need to learn about government-wide funding and research to put the Agency's funding issues in a larger context. Dr. Gilmour agreed and added that the Subcommittee could recommend that the Agency or an external review panel conduct this type of review.

Dr. Johnson suggested that the proposed interagency council could perform that function. He added that there was little the Subcommittee could say about other agencies' funding; however, the report could state that: (1) the Agency lacks sufficient funding to do its job; (2) there is a need to leverage resources with other agencies; and (3) a larger perspective of federal mercury research and funding would be beneficial. He added that these are reasonable recommendations. They point out the limited understanding of government-wide, mercury-related funding; the observation that the Agency lacks sufficient funds; and the recognition that collaboration will allow more to be accomplished with the available resources. Dr. Windom suggested adding these comments to the first Overriding Recommendation.

Dr. Lambert suggested adding the sentence from page 3 to the first Overriding Recommendation, replacing the word "inadequate" with the word "limited" to sound less judgmental.

Dr. Waalkes cautioned that the numerous recommendations, such as enhanced communication, annual revisions, and now an additional resource analysis, would reduce the amount of funding available for research. Dr. Johnson replied that the recommendation to enhance communication was made because it is difficult to assess progress with a report that was prepared 2 years ago.

Dr. Windom summarized the comments thus far. Overriding Recommendation 1 should include and expand on the limited funding for ORD, considering the regulatory needs that exist for addressing the effects of mercury. It should mention the lack of a clear picture of ORD funding in the context of mercury funding government-wide, and it should recommend that the proposed interagency council address this issue.

Dr. Henderson recommended keeping the sentence on page 3 in addition to including it on page 1. Dr. Windom agreed and stated that he would reword it to sound less redundant. He will revise the text for the first Overriding Recommendation to incorporate the comments, send it to the Subcommittee members for review, and allow a short amount of time for their responses. He added that the lack of funding was the only contentious issue in the comments he received.

Dr. Johnson suggested that the report use the words “charge questions” in the first sentence to remain consistent with the rest of the document.

Dr. Lambert observed that the overall tone seemed slightly negative. He suggested changing the word “adequately” on page 4 to “completely” to soften the tone. Dr. Windom agreed to review the report to eliminate the negative tone. The Subcommittee considered the Agency’s mercury efforts to be very good; the major criticism was that the MYP should communicate the accomplishments more effectively. The comments were intended to be constructive criticism. Dr. Johnson recommended stating the positive aspects of the plan at the beginning of the report. Dr. Windom pointed out a positive sentence on the first page and agreed to expand upon it.

Dr. Waalkes recommended that research partners and grant awardees be referred to as extramural research groups. This would eliminate the perception of an unfair advantage to grant recipients. The Subcommittee agreed with this recommendation.

Dr. Johnson and Dr. Windom thanked the Subcommittee for their participation and commended their work on this project. Mr. William Stelz (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], National Center for Environmental Research) added his appreciation of the Subcommittee’s work. He looked forward to receiving the final comments, which he knew would be very helpful.

Dr. Johnson offered to provide the Subcommittee members with a copy of the final letter report submitted to ORD. In addition, he will share the responses from ORD so that the Subcommittee members can see the results of their efforts. Ms. Heather Drumm (EPA, Office of Science Policy), the Designated Federal Officer for the Subcommittee, stated that comments should be sent to Dr. Windom only. Dr. Windom agreed to send out a new draft with the changes highlighted in red. He asked that the members focus on the text in Overriding Recommendation 1 and check for typographical errors; the major substantive issues have been resolved. He asked the members to respond to his draft as quickly as possible. He will

incorporate their comments and send them a final draft. This final draft report will be sent to the BOSC Executive Committee for review and approval.

Dr. Johnson explained that there will be a presentation on the letter report at the June BOSC meeting. Dr. Windom will give an overview of the report, then the vetters (members of the BOSC Executive Committee) will provide their comments. Finally, there will be open discussion to seek approval of the report by the BOSC.

Dr. Windom stated that he would provide the Subcommittee members with a copy of the final report submitted to ORD, and reiterated that they would receive the responses from ORD as well.

Public Comments

Ms. Drumm opened the discussion to members of the public. She had received many comments by e-mail, most of which concerned dental amalgam.

Ms. Kelly Gallagher, a filmmaker who documents mercury issues worldwide, joined the conference call at this point. She expressed concern about the hazards of mercury and emphasized the necessity of containing mercury, which currently is being released into wastewater streams and other media. She did not believe that the cap-and-trade approach is in the best interest of human health, and that children's health should come before corporate interests. Ms. Gallagher stated that she did not know the Subcommittee's particular mission, but she noted the numerous toxic effects of mercury and stressed the need for mercury separators at wastewater treatment plants.

Dr. Windom explained the parameters of the Mercury MYP Subcommittee. He agreed that there are significant needs related to mercury, and suggested that her comments should be addressed to Congress and others who make decisions regarding funding. Dr. Johnson explained that the Subcommittee's mission was to ensure that the Agency's mercury program was well planned, focused appropriately, and aligned with EPA's mission. Ms. Drumm offered to provide more information to Ms. Gallagher regarding the charge of the Subcommittee and to forward Ms. Gallagher's e-mail comments to the Subcommittee members.

Final Comments

Dr. Windom thanked the Subcommittee members for their work on the report. He reiterated that he would incorporate the latest revisions to the report this week and send them to the members for comment. After incorporating any final changes, he will send the Subcommittee members a copy of the draft report that will be submitted to the BOSC.

Dr. Windom adjourned the conference call at 9:50 a.m.

Action Items

- ✧ Dr. Windom will revise the draft letter report to incorporate the Subcommittee's comments.
- ✧ Dr. Windom will send the revised draft letter report to the Subcommittee members for review.
- ✧ Subcommittee members will provide comments within approximately 1 week.
- ✧ Dr. Windom will submit the final draft letter report to the BOSC Executive Committee prior to their June 2005 meeting and provide copies for the Subcommittee members.
- ✧ Dr. Johnson will provide the Subcommittee members with a copy of the final letter report to ORD and ORD's responses.
- ✧ Ms. Drumm will provide Ms. Kelly with information regarding the Mercury MYP Subcommittee.
- ✧ Ms. Drumm will forward Ms. Kelly's comments to the Subcommittee.

List of Participants

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APPENDIX

**Teleconference Agenda
March 29, 2005
9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. EST**

**U.S. EPA Board of Scientific Counselors
Mercury Subcommittee**

**Teleconference Agenda
March 29, 2005
9:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. EST
(202) 275-0166/3430**

Tuesday March 29, 2005

9:00 a.m.	Mechanics of Call/Roll Call	Heather Drumm, DFO, Mercury Subcommittee
9:15 a.m.	Welcome and Review of Progress	Dr. Herb Windom, Chair, Mercury Subcommittee
9:30 a.m.	Group Discussion Finalize Letter Report	
10:45 a.m.	Public Comments	
10:55 a.m.	Wrap-up	Dr. Herb Windom
11:00 a.m.	Adjourn	